

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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P R 270920Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7638
INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY SEOUL
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SINGAPORE 1811

EXDIS

DEPT PLS PASS TO CINCPAC AND HQ AFLC WPAFB OHIO

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAIR, EIND, MILI, SN
SUBJECT: PACIFIC PDMS SURVEY

REF: STATE 090129

SUMMARY: IN EMBASSY'S JUDGEMENT POLITICAL FACTORS
MILITATE AGAINST THE ESTABLISHMENT IN SINGAPORE OF THE
DEPOT LEVEL MAINTENANCE PROGRAM DESCRIBED REFTEL. EMBASSY
BELIEVES OPERATION OF THIS SIZE AND VISIBILITY WOULD
CREATE EXCESSIVE MILITARY PRESENCE AND COULD JEOPARDIZE
MORE IMPORTANT ACCESS TO SINGAPORE'S MILITARY FACILITIES
WE CURRENTLY ENJOY AS WELL AS ADDITIONAL ACCESS WE MAY
SEEK TO OBTAIN OVER NEXT TWO YEARS. THEREFORE, REQUEST
SINGAPORE BE OMITTED FROM ITINERARY OF AFLC SURVEY TEAM.
END SUMMARY.

1. IN CONSIDERING QUESTION OF ESTABLISHING DEPOT LEVEL
MAINTENANCE PROGRAM DESCRIBED REFTEL, EMBASSY CONSIDERS
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FOLLOWING FACTORS TO BE PARTICULARLY PERTINENT:
(A) DESPITE SINGAPORE'S MEMBERSHIP IN THE NON-ALIGNED
CLUB, THE U.S. CURRENTLY ENJOYS A REMARKABLE DEGREE OF
MILITARY ACCESS TO SINGAPORE'S NAVAL AND AIR FACILITIES.
UNITS OF THE SEVENTH FLEET INCLUDING AIRCRAFT CARRIERS
VISIT HERE WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT LIMITATION AND OUR SAILORS
CONTINUE TO RECEIVE A FRIENDLY WELCOME IN THIS CLEAN,

SECURE AND HOSPITABLE ENVIRONMENT. OUR SEVENTH FLEET SHIPS ALSO HAVE ACCESS TO EXCELLENT BUNKERING AND REPAIR FACILITIES AT THE FORMER UK NAVAL BASIN AND THE SEMBAWANG SHIPYARD AT THE NORTHERN END OF THE ISLAND. THE GOS ALSO ACCORDS ALMOST AUTOMATIC CLEARANCE TO U.S. MILITARY AIRCRAFT TRANSITING SINGAPORE IN SUPPORT OF SEVENTH FLEET OPERATIONS. SEVERAL MONTHS AGO THE GOS AGREED TO ALLOW MAC FLIGHTS TO DIEGO GARCIA TO TRANSIT SINGAPORE ON AN INTERMITTENT BASIS. IT HAS ALSO ALLOWED A LIMITED NUMBER OF SEABEES FROM DIEGO GARCIA TO TAKE LEAVE IN SINGAPORE. IN ADDITION THE PRIME MINISTER HAS PERMITTED P-3 OVERFLIGHTS TO DIEGO GARCIA AND MAY BE WILLING TO ALLOW THE STAGING OF P-3 INDIAN OCEAN RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS THROUGH SINGAPORE PROVIDED THE ADMINISTRATION IS ABLE TO OBTAIN CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR SUCH A MOVE.

(B) RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN US AND SINGAPORE ARMED FORCES

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE US AND SINGAPORE ARMED FORCES HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY FRIENDLY AND COOPERATIVE. THIS HAS COME ABOUT THROUGH OUR WILLINGNESS TO FACILITATE TRAINING TO THE SAF, OUR POSITIVE RESPONSE TO MODEST GOS REQUESTS FOR CASH PURCHASES OF EQUIPMENT, AND SAF PARTICIPATION IN OCCASIONAL JOINT MILITARY EXERCISES (MERLION SERIES) WHEN TASK FORCES OF THE U.S. SEVENTH FLEET TRANSIT THE REGION. THIS RELATIONSHIP WILL MOVE ONE STEP CLOSER IN JULY WITH THE ARRIVAL OF A FIVE-MAN USAF MILITARY TRAINING ASSISTANCE TEAM (MTAT) WHICH IS BEING PROVIDED BY THE U.S. AIR FORCE UNDER A
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TWO-YEAR CONTRACT TO TRAIN RSAF STAFF IN MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES. IN BUILDING THIS RELATIONSHIP THE U.S. AND GOS HAVE CAREFULLY REFRAINED FROM ANY ACTIONS WHICH WOULD UNDERMINE THE IMAGE WHICH THE GOS SEEKS TO PROJECT OF A NON-ALIGNED GOVERNMENT PURSUING AN INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY. THE GOS HAS PAID IN FULL FOR ALL THE EQUIPMENT IT BUYS AND HAS NOT SOUGHT (AND WE HAVE NOT PUSHED) THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PERMANENTLY ASSIGNED MILITARY ADVISORS.

(C) OUR SUCCESS IN DEVELOPING SUCH EXCELLENT ACCESS TO SINGAPORE'S MILITARY FACILITIES AND IN BUILDING THE COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE RSAF DESCRIBED ABOVE CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO MANY FACTORS, MOST NOTABLY THE PRIME MINISTER'S DESIRE TO KEEP THE US SEVENTH FLEET OPERATING IN THE REGION TO BALANCE SOVIET NAVAL POWER. HOWEVER, ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT FACTORS HAS BEEN OUR SUCCESSFUL EFFORT TO MAINTAIN A LOW MILITARY PROFILE. THE U.S. HAS ONLY SOUGHT ACCESS TO FACILITIES ON A PERMISSIVE BASIS AND HAS REFRAINED FROM SEEKING ACCESS

RIGHTS, OR THE OWNERSHIP OF THE FACILITIES THEMSELVES. WE HAVE GENERALLY SENT SINGAPOEANS TO THE U.S. FOR TRAINING RATHER THAN BRINGING U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL TO SINGAPORE. (THE MTAT IS THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT EXCEPTION TO THIS POLICY). WE HAVE ALSO KEPT A TIGHT REIN ON THE NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL ASSIGNED TO SINGAPORE. CONSEQUENTLY, OUR TRAINING ACTIVITIES AND EXTENSIVE FMS SALES HAVE ALL BEEN HANDLED BY OUR TEN-MAN DAO OFFICE, AND THE COMPLEX REQUIREMENTS FOR BUNKERING AND REPAIR OF U.S. SHIPS HAVE BEEN MANAGED BY THE SMALL THIRTEEN-MAN U.S. NAVY OFFICE.

(D) THE HIGHLY USEFUL ACCESS WE ENJOY AND THE CURRENT COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OUR ARMED FORCES COULD BE JEOPARDIZED OVER TIME IF WE PERMITTED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PROGRAM DESCRIBED IN REFTEL. TO ASSIGN 35 MILITARY AND 35 U.S. CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES TO SINGAPORE WOULD MEAN MORE
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THAN DOUBLING THE TOTAL NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL CURRENTLY ASSIGNED HERE AND ALMOST DOUBLING THE TOTAL U.S. OFFICIAL PRESENCE IN SINGAPORE. PERFORMING MAINTENANCE, OVERHAUL AND POSSIBLE MODIFICATIONS ON 170 AIRCRAFT A YEAR COULD INVOLVE THE PRESENCE OF AS MANY AS 30 OR 40 U.S. MILITARY AIRCRAFT IN SINGAPORE AT ANY ONE TIME INCLUDING F-4 FIGHTER AIRCRAFT. PRESUMABLY THESE PLANES WOULD HAVE TO BE FLIGHT TESTED AFTER OVERHAUL WHICH WOULD INCREASE THEIR VISIBILITY. THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS WOULD, OF COURSE, BECOME AWARE OF THIS OPERATION AND MIGHT PRODUCE SPECULATIVE ARTICLES ATTEMPTING TO CONNECT THE MTAT, SUPPORT FLIGHTS TO DIEGO GARCIA, P-3 FLIGHTS (IF THESE ARE APPROVED DURING THE NEXT YEAR) AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PDM OPERATION AS EVIDENCE THAT THE U.S. IS DEVELOPING A SPECIAL MILITARY RELATIONSHIP WITH SINGAPORE INVOLVING A LARGE COMPLEX OF OPERATIONS.

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED ABOVE ADDEES.

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W

-----271010Z 009465 /11

P R 270920Z APR 77

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7639

INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

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(E) THERE IS ALSO A REAL POSSIBILITY THAT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PDM OPERATION IN SINGAPORE RISKS BEING MISINTERPRETED BY FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS. SINCE THE FALL OF VIETNAM THE U.S. HAS WITHDRAWN FORCES FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PDM OPERATION FOLLOWING THE INCREASED USE OF SINGAPORE FACILITIES BY U.S. FORCES FOR OTHER PURPOSES (SEE PARA 1A ABOVE) COULD MISLEAD A NUMBER OF GOVERNMENTS AS TO THE NATURE OF THE FUTURE U.S. MILITARY ROLE IN SINGAPORE AND SOUTHEAST ASIA. THIS MIGHT GENERATE NEGATIVE REACTIONS FROM SINGAPORE'S NEAR NEIGHBORS, ESPECIALLY-MALAYSIA) WHICH MIGHT QUESTION WHETHER THIS NEW INFUSION OF U.S. MILITARY ACTIVITY IN THE REGION WOULD BE CONTRARY TO THE ASEAN ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY UNDER WHICH THE ASEAN GOVERNMENTS HAVE AGREED IN PRINCIPLE THAT ALL FOREIGN MILITARY FORCES SHOULD EVENTUALLY BE WITHDRAWN. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT SIGNIFICANT PRESS SPECULATION AND/OR CONCERNS EXPRESSED BY NEIGHBORING GOVERNMENTS COULD CAUSE THE GOS TO RECONSIDER THE EXTENT TO WHICH IT IS WILLING TO COOPERATE IN SATISFYING OUR MILITARY REQUIRE-

MENTS. IF THE GOS DECIDED TO CHANGE DIRECTION IT MIGHT LEAVE A PDM OPERATION IN PLACE FOR COMMERCIAL REASONS, BUT REDUCE COOPERATION IN AREAS OF GREATER STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE TO US.

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(F) GOS ITSELF WOULD PROBABLY HAVE AMBIVALENT FEELINGS ABOUT THIS PROJECT. MINDEF AND EDB HAVE ALWAYS BEEN INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING-AN AEROSPACE INDUSTRY IN SINGAPORE AND WOULD PROBABLY SEE THIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP A SKILLED WORKFORCE WHICH COULD SUSTAIN SUCH AN INDUSTRY. THE SINGAPORE AEROSPACE MAINTENANCE COMPANY (SAMCO) AND LOCKHEED AIR SERVICES SINGAPORE (LASS), WHICH CURRENTLY HAVE THE CONTRACTS FOR RSAF MAINTENANCE, OVERHAUL AND AIRCRAFT MODIFICATION, BOTH HAVE CONSIDERABLE UNUSED CAPACITY AND WOULD WELCOME THE OPPORTUNITY FOR FRESH BUSINESS. HOWEVER, MFA AND PERHAPS SOME OTHER ELEMENTS IN THE GOVERNMENT WOULD PROBABLY ARGUE THAT THE INTRODUCTION OF SUCH A LARGE NUMBER OF

U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL AND AIRCRAFT WOULD JEOPARDIZE SINGAPORE'S NON-ALIGNED IMAGE AND WOULD PROVIDE A POTENTIAL TARGET FOR DOMESTIC OPPOSITION. IN WEIGHING THE PROS AND CONS THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD HAVE TO CONSIDER THE SOVIET REACTION. THE GOS HAS REPEATEDLY REBUFFED SOVIET EFFORTS TO ACQUIRE AN OIL STORAGE FACILITY IN SINGAPORE. IF THE GOS PERMITS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A LARGE PDM OPERATION THE SOVIETS WOULD HAVE AN ADDED EXCUSE TO PREASSURE THE GOS TO BE EQUALLY ACCOMMODATING TO SOVIET REQUESTS.

(G) IF THE GOS DID DECIDE TO ACCEDE TO A U.S. REQUEST FOR A DEPOT LEVEL MAINTENANCE FACILITY, IT WOULD BE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE GOVERNMENT TO EXPECT SOME KIND OF QUID PRO QUO FOR ITS COOPERATION. THIS COULD TAKE THE FORM OF A REQUEST TO PURCHASE CERTAIN MILITARY EQUIPMENT AT CONCESSIONAL PRICES, SUCH AS THE PENDING REQUEST FOR TWO C-130S.

2. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT IT IS POSSIBLE THAT IF THE U.S. WERE TO MAKE A STRONG DEMARCHE REQUESTING GOS CONSENT FOR THE

ESTABLISHMENT OF A DEPOT LEVEL MAINTENANCE FACILITY, THE GOS MIGHT EVENTUALLY AGREE TO IT. HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE IT IS NOT IN OUR INTEREST TO DO SO. EVEN THOUGH THE GOS IS POLITICALLY STABLE AND HAS NO PROBLEM WITH A DOMESTIC OPPOSITION TODAY THIS MAY NOT BE THE SECRET

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CASE A FEW YEARS FROM NOW. WE DO NOT THINK IT IS WISE TO INTRODUCE OPERATIONS HERE WHICH WOULD RAISE THE U.S. MILITARY PROFILE SIGNIFICANTLY IF SUCH OPERATIONS CAN BE PERFORMED ELSEWHERE. WE SEE NO REASON EXPOSE THE GOS NEEDLESSLY TO EITHER EXTERNAL OR INTERNAL PRESSURES WHICH MIGHT JEOPARDIZE THE HIGHLY FAVORABLE SITUATION WHICH CURRENTLY PREVAILS WITH RESPECT TO OUR OTHER MILITARY INTERESTS IN SINGAPORE. THEREFORE, UNLESS RESPONSES TO REFTEL FROM OTHER POSTS INDICATE THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING THIS OPERATION ELSEWHERE IN EAST ASIA, RECOMMEND SINGAPORE NOT BE INCLUDED IN THE ITINERARY OF THE AFLC SURVEY TEAM.

3. COUNTRY TEAM CONCURS.
GRANT

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Message Attributes

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